

Spies: Foot Soldiers in an En

OUTSIDE London's Marlborough Street magistrates' court one morning last week, a throng of newsmen waited impatiently. The object of their interest, an ostensibly minor Soviet trade official named Oleg Lyalin, 34, failed to show up to answer the charges against him—"driving while unfit through drink." He was resting instead in a comfortable country house near London where, for the past several weeks, he had been giving British intelligence a complete rundown on local Soviet espionage operations. His revelations prompted the British government two weeks ago to carry out the most drastic action ever undertaken in the West against Soviet spies: the expulsion of 105 diplomats and other officials—nearly 20% of the 550 Russian officials based in Britain.

The case generated waves from Moscow to Manhattan. As soon as Soviet Party Leader Leonid Brezhnev returned to the Soviet capital from his three-day visit to Yugoslavia, he took the extraordinary step of convening an emergency meeting of the 15-man Politburo right on the premises of Vnukovo Airport. The high-level conference, which forced a 24-hour delay of a state dinner in honor of India's visiting Premier Indira Gandhi, might have dealt with the still-mysterious goings-on in China. But it might also have dealt with the difficult problem of how the Kremlin should react to the unprecedented British expulsions—a problem that Moscow, by week's end, had not yet solved.

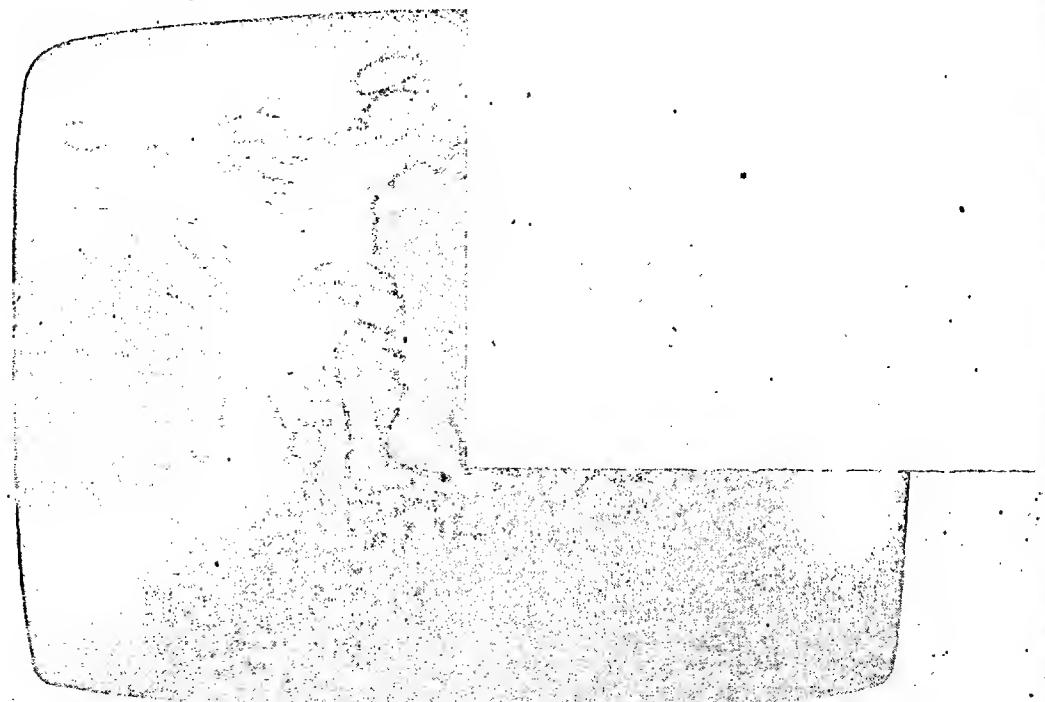
Potato-Faced Fellows

In Manhattan, British Foreign Secretary Sir Alec Douglas-Home spent 80 minutes with Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko. "We have taken our action," said Sir Alec, "and that's all there is to it." Nonetheless, he emphasized that the British step was "designed to remove an obstacle to good relations." Harrumphed Gromyko: "That's a fine way to improve relations." He added that Moscow would be forced to retaliate. But the British apparently knew of some spies among the remaining 445 Russians in Britain. "Yes," said a Foreign Office man, "we have retained second-strike capability."

The British case dramatized the expanse and expense of espionage activity round the world. It was also a reminder that the old spy business, which has received little attention in the past three or four years, is as intense—and dirty—as ever, despite the rise of a new type of operative. Since World War II, espionage has undergone a metamorphosis. For a time, its stars were the famed "illegal" or "decoy" agents—the Colonel Abels, the Gordon Lonsdales, the Kim Philbys. Says British Sovietologist Robert Conquest:

embassy operations rather as a skilled armored thrust compares with human-wave tactics in war." Moreover, the growing phalanxes of routine operatives are supported by spy-in-the-sky satellites that can send back photographs showing the precise diameter of a newly dug missile silo. But even as the modern army still needs the foot soldier, so does espionage still need the agent on the ground. "A photograph may show you what a new plane looks like," says a key intelligence expert, "but it won't tell you what's inside those engines and how they operate. For that you still need someone to tell you."

Eric Ambler, author of spy mysteries, has little use for the new species of



BBC FILM SHOWING SOVIET "DIPLOMAT" AT SECRET PICKUP POINT

There was still a roar in the old lion.

spy, particularly the representatives of the *Komitet Gosudarstvennoi Bezopasnosti* (KGB), the Soviet Committee for State Security, and the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency. "KGB men?" he sneers. "They're the potato-faced fellows you see on trains in Eastern Europe wearing suits that aren't quite right and smelling too much of eau de cologne. The CIA people all smell like after-shave lotion. They always look as if they are on their way to some boring sales conference for an unexciting product—and in a way, they are."

In one respect, Ambler is unfair and behind the times. The contemporary KGB man is generally far more polished and sophisticated, more accomplished in foreign languages and manners than his counterpart of a few years ago. But Ambler is right in

liberately misleading, planted by departments of "disinformation."

It is work that occupies tens of thousands of mathematicians and cryptographers, clerks and military analysts, often with the most trivial-seeming tasks. Yet it is work that no major nation feels it can afford to halt. Says a former British ambassador: "We all spy, of course, more or less. But the Russians are rather busier at it than most. They're more basic too: not so subtle as our chaps. I like to think that we have a certain finesse in our methods—that we don't go at the thing bull-headed. But maybe our tasks are different from theirs, just because this country is so wide open."

Wide open or not, there remains the question, in Eric Ambler's words: "What on earth has the KGB got to spy on in Britain? ... No, I think 105 spies